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Female Stardom in Contemporary Romanian New Wave Cinema: Unglamour?

Andrea Virginás, Sapientia University

Abstract: *This article analyses film roles, red-carpet appearances and nonfilmic performances of three of the most well-known and admired actresses of the Romanian New Wave (Luminița Gheorghiu, Maria Popistașu and Anamaria Marinca). Their unglamorous female stardom is paradoxical if considered from the standpoint of mainstream/dominant cinema and the tradition described by Jackie Stacey as "[t]he 'visual pleasure' offered by the glamour and sexual appeal of Hollywood stars" (159). Aspects such as the major contradiction between screen role and screen persona, or the lack of ideal(istic) images offered to the audience are theorised on the basis of Christine Gledhill's and Richard Dyer's models, Anne Morey's term of "the elegiac female grotesque" and Ana Salzberg's concept of narcissistic Hollywood female stardom and embodied experience (107). The coherence of unglamorous female stardom as a real-life discursive construct emerges in the article through the consideration of Romanian New Wave cinema–similarly to 1970s-1980s New Indian Cinema in which unglamorous female stars existed (Gandhy-Thomas)–as a peripheral cinematic formation defined by a specific relation to glamour and consumption (Dyer, Gundle). Furthermore, the article suggests that this coherence is dependent on considering the production context of the Romanian New Wave in the framework of small national European cinemas (Hjort and Petrie, Soila), while emphasising the lack of integrated studio background (Haskell) and the fact that its female stars have been conditioned by postcommunist possibilities to articulate female public identities (Pasca Harsanyi, Roman).*

The standard of glamorous female stardom has its origin in the integrated production system of classical Hollywood and the ensuing genre conventions. Jackie Stacey observes that the "glamour and sexual appeal of Hollywood stars" offers "visual pleasure" in the context of mainstream Western cinema, or indeed the woman's film (159). Glamour's association to female movie stars, however, has had its limits both in major and small national cinemas worldwide. Female stars in 1970s–1980s New Indian Cinema, such as Smita Patil, were described as explicitly and intentionally missing glamour (Gandhy and Thomas), while European stars emerging from small national cinemas were analysed in contrast to Hollywood actresses in this respect (Soila). Unglamorous stardom, as a cultural-discursive formation, has also formed part of contemporary Romanian New Wave cinema, and it is this phenomenon that my article seeks to describe, understand and theorise through three brief case studies of three actors who figure in this phenomenon.

After a short analysis of the star images of Luminița Gheorghiu, Maria Popistașu and Anamaria Marinca, I will situate these in the context of classical female stardom theories (Mulvey; Gledhill; Stacey; Dyer; Morey; Salzberg). In the third part of the article, I will describe this type of unglamorous female movie star as related to the production context of small national cinemas (Hjort and Petrie; Iversen; Dhoest), of which contemporary Romanian cinema might be considered a representative. Finally, I will conclude by demonstrating that locally specific

female-public identity stereotypes related to postcommunist Eastern Europe (Harsanyi; Roman) also contribute to the phenomenon of the female movie star who, while not entirely devoid of glamorous aspects, ultimately possesses an ordinary, everyday star persona.

The Romanian New Wave and Three Actors

In terms of international film festival prizes and critical recognition, the Romanian New Wave is one of the most successful arthouse trends to emerge from postcommunist Eastern Europe. Doru Pop even proclaims it "one of the most important movements in contemporary European filmmaking", arguing that "[t]hese 'new' films, most of them screened and produced between 2001 and 2011, were considered something of a revelation" (7). A neorealistic, post-Dogma, festival-circuit filmic trend, which has also been linked to global slow cinema, the Romanian New Wave fully materialises in 2005 with Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*). Critics evaluate that the trend either reached its peak or started to weaken in 2013, due to films such as Călin Peter Netzer's *Child's Pose* (*Poziția copilului*, 2013) and Corneliu Porumboiu's *When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism* (*Când se lasă seara peste București sau metabolism*, 2013), films that, in contrast to earlier ones, are explicitly self-reflexive with regard to media and film genre templates.

These and other titles of the Romanian New Wave—of which I will consider *Love Sick* (*Legături bolnăvicoase*, Tudor Giurgiu, 2006)*, 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*, Cristian Mungiu, 2007), *Summer Holiday* (*Boogie*, Radu Muntean, 2008) and *Tuesday, After Christmas* (*Marți, după Crăciun,* Radu Muntean*,* 2010)—are rich in memorable female characters. "The return of female protagonists in the center of the stories of the young moviemakers" most often results in detailed depictions of female traumas and tragedies (Pop 181). Films that represent female issues in their diegetic worlds, or that aspire to affect a female audience by elements in the mise-en-scène for example, or with female stars "tamed" by a capable male director have been designated in film history as the woman's film—such as in the case of 1940s melodramas—and their directors labelled as women's directors, a term applied to Hollywood director George Cukor among others. Despite the obvious similarities, films of the Romanian New Wave are not considered women's films in Romanian public discourse or in the international critical reception, nor does anyone speak about women's directors. According to Pop, the most a critic can do is "definitely argue that there is a feminist *predisposition* in the contemporary Romanian films" (183; emphasis in original).

The analysis that follows refers to film roles, festival red-carpet appearances and nonfilmic performances of three of the most well-known and appreciated actors of the Romanian New Wave in the 2005–2013 period, during which the this type of cinema was at the height of its popularity at film festivals and in critical discourse. In Christine Gledhill's classical model, "the star as a construct" is composed of "the real person; the character s/he plays; and the star's persona" (qtd. in Hayward 352). Richard Dyer's formulation adds an important clarification: "The star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars" (2). In the case of each actor here considered, not only their images but also a series of events will be analysed, during which the full-blown illusion of a Romanian New Wave female star actor was

destroyed—red-carpet appearances, q and a sessions at festival screenings and mainstream media and publicity material, which are normally meant to create such an illusion. Thus, instead of a harmonious interaction leading to the coherence of the components in Gledhill's model (the real person, the film role and the star persona) or a logical interlocking of the star-creating spheres differentiated by Dyer (film industry output, media output, star's activities, and spectators' activities), a strange jamming and/or oppositional functioning presents itself (qtd. in Hayward 352).

Veteran Romanian actress Luminița Gheorghiu, nominated for Best Actress at the 2013 Berlinale, has built her career on a series of impressive roles. She has performed (up to 2014) thirty-four film roles in forty years, appearing in some of the most significant films in contemporary Romanian cinema: Stere Gulea's *The Moromete Family* (*Morometii*, 1988), Radu Mihăileanu's *Train of Life* (*Trenul vieții*, 1998), Michael Haneke's *Code Unknown* (*Code inconnu*, 2000),[1] and Cristi Puiu's important Romanian New Wave titles: *Stuff and Dough* (*Marfa și banii*, 2001), *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, and *Aurora* (2010). Gheorghiu also appeared in other essential Romanian New Wave films: Corneliu Porumboiu's *12:08 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost?*, 2006) and Mungiu's *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* and *Beyond the Hills* (*După dealuri*, 2012). Her biggest success was in the role of Cornelia Keneres in the 2013 Berlin Film Festival winner *Child's Pose*.

Child's Pose centres around a well-to-do, distinguished, urban Romanian family and the very different strategies its two generations adopt when a major tragedy occurs: the family heir, a cynical and nervous man in his thirties, kills a village boy with his car. A fight of mythical dimensions between the aging, yet energetic and glamorous mother of the guilty man—Cornelia as played by Gheorghiu—and the Romanian judicial system evolves in parallel to what may be called a fatal game between a domineering mother and her son, the latter suffocated and simultaneously nourished by motherhood and intense maternal feelings. An exemplary moment of the Romanian New Wave's "feminist *predisposition*" (Pop 183; emphasis in original), touching upon such issues in the relatively conservative, patriarchal Romanian society, the film can be viewed as the demonstration of a certain degree of courage on the part of its creators.

In the light of these aspects *Child's Pose* may be adequately characterised as a woman's film in Molly Haskell's classic definition of the term as a filmic subgenre based on "the notion of middle-classness, not just as an economic status, but as a state of mind and a relatively rigid moral code" ("The Woman's Film", 22). Haskell's "middle-classness" is one of the main reasons why Cornelia clashes with her reckless son (Bogdan Dumitrache) who doesn't accept such standards as they are enacted in present-day Romania. The heroine of the woman's film "is dependent for her well-being and 'fulfilment' on institutions—marriage, motherhood—that by translating the word 'woman' into 'wife' and 'mother', end her independent identity" ("The Woman's Film", 22). Haskell's formulation sums up Cornelia's tragedy too, as she loses her sense of self, rejected both as a mother and as a wife throughout the process of trying to save her son from a justified prison sentence. Despite Netzer's film being typically representative of the classical woman's film and the subgenre being an ideal vehicle for the transformation of actors into stars, the persona of actor Luminița Gheorghiu does not coagulate into that of a mature and glamorous female star. Instead it presents a paradoxical, therefore ambivalent, amalgam of

"perfected representation" (Gundle 3–4) and an "everyday ordinariness" which isn't, however, even "charismatic" (Iversen; Dhoest).

Child's Pose's publicity stills were made public before the film's national premiere, as a result of the movie's well-organised Facebook campaign, created for its screening at the 2013 Berlin Film Festival. This material highlighted the figure of Gheorghiu and her complex, naturalistic, powerful performance as the mother. A still from the film (Figure 1), which was widely publicised, recalls actor Bette Davis in the role of Margo Channing in *All about Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950) (Figure 2).

Figure 1 (above): Luminița Gheorghiu as the mother in *Child's Pose* (Călin Peter Netzer, 2013). Parada Film, 2013. Figure 2 (below): Bette Davis as Margo Channing in *All about Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950). Fox, 2012. Screenshots.

Even if the association of Gheorghiu with Davis was not explicitly intended by the promotional campaign,[2] Luminița Gheorghiu's long career and her ability to perform as a glamorous woman seemed to put the production team and the marketing division that created the aforementioned online (and later offline) campaign at ease granting her the status of home-grown, yet authentic star. Textual evidence also supports the possibility of association: *All about Eve* is one of the quintessential diva films in cinema history, a woman's film and also an implicit maternal melodrama. In her analysis of Bette Davis's star career, Anne Morey calls the film an "elegiac grotesque", which in her definition refers to "a role in which actresses play female stars at the end of their powers" (105), recalling the role performed by Gheorghiu in *Child's Pose*: the defeated mother, previously a star of her social milieu. It seemed therefore possible for Luminița Gheorghiu to recreate a glamorous 1950s Bette Davis at the peak of her acting career and in her most powerful position as a star, as her situation was similar, while also performing a similar role.

Two events, however (one of which I attended), blocked this seamless and glamorous star image. Curiously, both events were part of the standard processes that the field of star studies identifies as fundamental in fabricating star personas: public appearances and publicity material designed to sustain communication with the public. The first event that signalled an evident unglamouring of Luminița Gheorghiu's powerful performance in an elegiac woman's film was the red carpet photo sequence of the *Child's Pose* creative team during the 2013 Berlin Film Festival. Here, the actress, similarly to Bogdan Dumitrache, who played her son, was rumoured to be dressed especially for the occasion by a famous Romanian designer.[3] However, her office-type outfit made of shiny material with a mismatching jacket transformed the Romanian Bette Davis into an aging woman, adding a touch of awkwardness and shyness to the actor who so excelled onscreen. As Luminița Gheorghiu's performance in the film highlighted her abilities and showed what an exceptional actor she was, it was regrettable that she missed the opportunity to experience a Bette Davis-style moment on the Berlin red carpet.

Figure 3: Luminița Gheorghiu on the 2013 Berlin Festival red carpet. Press material.

The q and a session after the first Romanian public screening of *Child's Pose* at the annual Transylvania International Film Festival in Cluj-Napoca in June 2013, following the film's Golden Bear Berlin prize, was a similarly disappointing event. Those members of the audience who asked the actor questions did not seem to treat her as a Bette-Davis figure, rather they approached Gheorghiu as a kind of well-loved neighbour. One question in particular characterised this attitude: did Luminița Gheorghiu, as a mother, think we should help our adult children like Cornelia does in *Child's Pose*, or should we not get involved in their lives? This actress whom I admired and from whose various mediatised faces I had formed a star image of my own at that moment was addressed as just an ordinary person, who is a parent, who has children, or who is a child. This seemed to be a lowest common denominator point, resulting in the deposition of Luminița Gheorghiu from the red carpet into the mildly dusty interiors of an average Romanian cinema.

My second mini case study is that of Maria Popistașu, 2007 Berlin Film Festival's EFP Shooting Star and one of the most remarkable actors of the Romanian generation Y. Her breakthrough role in a Romanian New Wave film was the strangely savage and also crudely precise figure of Kiki in Tudor Giurgiu's coming-of-age, bisexual and incestuous love story *Love Sick*. Here, Popistașu plays a beautiful young woman, a university undergraduate in literature, who sexually fascinates a man—her brother (Tudor Chirilă)—and a woman—her best friend (Ioana Barbu)—by her sheer presence.

Figure 4: Maria Popistașu as Kiki (centre) in *Love Sick* (Tudor Giurgiu, 2006). Pro Video, 2006. Screenshot.

In Radu Muntean's *Tuesday, After Christmas*, a marital melodrama nominated for the 2010 Cannes Film Festival's Un Certain Regard award, Popistașu was typecast again as the seductress. She plays the part of a young dentist, Raluca, who proves irresistible to a well-meaning but weak-willed husband, and whose primal instincts destroy the heart and home of a seemingly happy, long-time married couple. The actress's lean, somewhat androgynous naked body appears in the opening sequences of both films, as a form emerging from the background, a pattern drawn by light and shadow, but also a sensual diegetic image. The long, slow and fixed takes that comprise these body images of Popistașu, alongside her less visible male partners, create an ambiguous context: at once provocative in their low-level diegetisation of female sexual pleasure, but also transforming the body of the actor as Romanian New Wave star into a spectacle in the classic Mulvey framework.

Figure 5: Maria Popistașu as a nude pattern in *Tuesday, After Christmas* (Radu Muntean, 2010). Voodoo Films, 2010. Screenshot.

Thus it was unsurprising that a newspaper article about Maria Popistașu chiefly identified her as a female body, this time a pregnant one—the article's title referring to her impending motherhood as "the role of [Popistașu's/her] life" (Maița). In her Freudian study of studio-era Hollywood female stars, Ana Salzberg observes that

> the abiding element in the narcissistic woman's identity is the materiality of her body itself—the corporeal presence whose aesthetic impact both grants her the privilege of self-containment and inspires the admiration of others, even as it has the potential to enable her transition to complete object-love through motherhood. (8)

The objectified and at once idealised female body of this young star of the Romanian New Wave has repeatedly appeared as caught within narcissistic structures, bodily and technological: looked at and "devoured" by her costars, the camera, and possibly the audience too, yet depicted as unattainable and self-enclosed by the end of screen time in both *Love Sick* and *Tuesday, After Christmas*.

However, Popistașu's 2010 Cannes Film Festival public appearances started to complicate her narcissistic star image, primarily based on her filmic roles. In an interview uploaded to YouTube (Hotnews Romania), and also in still photos on the official website of Getty Images taken at the Cannes premier of *Tuesday, After Christmas* on 14 May 2010, her understated female appearance is observed.[4] Popistașu's clothing, make-up and hairstyle convey a post-2008-depression economic modesty, with no trace of glamour either in her appearance, or indeed in the Getty photo series' lighting or background arrangement (Strummer). The subdued colour palette of her clothes, along with the ordinary, slightly inadequate red-carpet appearance, is more reminiscent of the workwear of a creative office employee, just as in the case of Luminița Gheorghiu's above mentioned 2013 workwear-style costume on the Berlinale red carpet. None of these images evoke a classical-Hollywood-type film star, enforcing the validity of Alexander Dhoest's rather categorical formulation: "Clearly, in Flanders, the classical notion of Hollywood stardom is not applicable. One could argue that this is the case in most of continental Europe" (24).

In addition, a 2013 music video available on YouTube forces the viewer to reconcile images of an actress represented as a desired female body in films, and a moderately elegant star on the 2010 red carpet at Cannes Film Festival, with a much understated performance as a singer. In the video of the song "The Boy" by Electric Brother featuring Maria Popistașu, the actress's bodily presence may be characterised as muted and effaced. Only her voice features on the video, the image focusing instead on the male character(s) mentioned in the title, who are shown on a laptop monitor in a long, fixed take, to the sound of Popistașu's singing. As with Cornelia's glamour in the diegesis of *Child's Pose*, which was further exploited through the seeming conflation of Luminița Gheorghiu with a stereotypical Bette Davis in the initial promotional campaign, Maria Popistașu's glamorous and narcissistic roles onscreen are reflected in a somewhat similar image in publicity materials; however "ordinariness", to the extent of the actor's glamorous body being literally nullified, is also observed.

While this is not meant to be an exhaustive study of the phenomenon of unglamouring female cinema stardom in the context of the Romanian New Wave, I also wish to mention perhaps the best known example of this kind: the actor Anamaria Marinca, EFP Shooting Star at the 2008 Berlinale. Marinca plays the role of Otilia in Mungiu's *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*, giving an acclaimed, multiple-award-winning performance in a film with a prestigious Cannes trophy. The role leaves little room for narcissistic mirroring and glamour: Otilia is a young engineering student in 1987 communist Romania who undergoes deeply traumatic experiences. Marinca's minimalist acting style, understated manner of speech and carefully precise, economical mode of movement through space re-emerges in another marital melodrama by Radu Muntean, *Summer Holiday*. Here Marinca plays Smaranda, a young mother pregnant for the second time, who is humiliated by, but still needs to comply with her husband's childish rush of panic as he approaches middle age.

Figure 6: Anamaria Marinca as Smaranda (with her son) in *Summer Holiday* (Radu Muntean, 2008). Voodoo Films, 2010. Screenshot.

Somewhat in contrast to Gheorghiu's case as Cornelia in Netzer's film, and more similar to the gradual effacement of Popistaşu's star persona, Marinca's star photographs and public appearances are a solid continuation of her serious and profound roles as traumatised women. For example, at a public meeting during the 2014 TIFF in Cluj-Napoca, Marinca appeared as an average woman, dressed in a casual outfit, without any high-profile companions and managed to blend so well with the crowd gathered to meet her that even the moderator had difficulty identifying the actress. Following my main argument, being nonnarcissistic, self-effacing and unglamorous as a Romanian New Wave actress and film star could be considered as a consistent and standard phenomenon. This is an observation indirectly supported by Marinca's latest role in Sebastián Cordero's *Europa Report* (2013), a moderately successful US science-fiction film with arthouse tendencies. Here she plays Rose, a plain and pragmatically dressed astronaut with no make-up, who is the last to die in a crew travelling to a tragic mission to one of planet Jupiter's moons.

Figure 7: Anamaria Marinca as the astronaut Rose in *Europa Report* (Sebastián Cordero, 2013). Ascot Elite, 2013. Screenshot.

Synthesising Edgar Morin's views on actors as stars and their diegetic roles, Ana Salzberg writes of this process that, "[i]nstead of a complete sublimation of persona to the demands of a diegetic character, or vice versa, the star generates a reflexive exchange between the two" (14). In Marinca's transition from tragic Romanian New Wave heroine in 2007 to tragic global arthouse heroine in 2013 we may discern the process wherein the star persona—in this case the unglamorous, traumatised and lonely woman played by Marinca—proves to be stronger than the diegetic character in a given film, with the phenomenon of explicit unglamorousness repeated again.

Theorising Unglamorous Stardom

Unglamorous stardom, even if named otherwise, has already been theorised as dependent on the particular actor's age in dominant or mainstream cinema. Referring to such classical Hollywood titles as *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945) or *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950), showcasing the performances of aging Joan Crawford and Gloria Swanson, respectively, Ana Salzberg writes that "the vulnerability of once-exalted bodies are [*sic*] revealed by a changing film industry, the threat of the double and/or professional rival, and the process of aging—attesting to the fragility, rather than certainty of ideality itself" (8). For her part, Anne Morey interprets Bette Davis's late performances, for example in Robert Aldrich's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) as actualising the aforementioned quality of the "female elegiac grotesque" (105). Unglamouring female film stars is certainly connected to our culturally specific, nevertheless ambivalent reactions to aging—however, the different age-groups of the actors considered here suggest that being unglamorous is not linked exclusively to actual or diegetic age. Of the three Romanian actors, one has had a long career starting in the communist period (Luminița Gheorghiu, b. 1949); however, the careers of the other two (Maria Popistașu, b. 1980, and Anamaria Marinca, b. 1978) began with the Romanian New Wave. Yet all three may

be described as explicitly unglamorous female film stars, with notable differences between their screen roles, their personas and their images as publicly accessible Romanian stars.

An analysis of Sofia Coppola's star-image affords a further insight into the gap between Luminița Gheorghiu as Bette Davis and Luminița Gheorghiu as solid East European actress, or Maria Popistașu's potentially gorgeous (but ultimately understated) Cannes red-carpet appearance, and Maria Popistașu as a faceless singer, or indeed Anamaria Marinca's ordinary star image. In a complex analysis of Coppola (b. 1971), the renowned film director and intellectual generation-X fashion icon—a generation older than Popistașu or Marinca and a generation younger than Gheorghiu—Caitlin Yunuen Lewis argues that "Coppola's persona embodies the archetypal ideal of 'classic white femininity'; she is dressed, positioned, and constructed to connote elegance, managed sexuality, demureness, self-control, emotional etiquette, and an ethereal denial of the abject, the bodily, and the earthly" (187). The disillusionment experienced in the actors' festival appearances might have been the exact sighting "of the bodily, and the earthly", orchestrated as plain meetings between common people dressed as conservatively proper to their age and bodily conditions.

However, the only problem with this answer lies in the fact that, as presented, all these actors have at least one famous role that deeply capitalises on their looks as common mortals, and the gestures, movements and dresses that accompany such a role. We might remember the nurse played by Luminița Gheorghiu in *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu,* Anamaria Marinca as Otilia in *4 Months, 3 Weeks 2 Days,* or as Smaranda in *Summer Holiday,* or the home sequences in both Giurgiu's and Muntean's films, where Popistașu also appears as a (more or less obedient) housewife.

Figure 8: Luminița Gheorghiu as the nurse in *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (Cristi Puiu, 2005). Pro Video, 2005. Screenshot.

Anne Morey also considers this aspect when she speaks about "impersonation, in which actors subordinate themselves to a role" as opposed to "personification, in which actors simply appear to play themselves" (119). In the analysed examples, actors "appear to play themselves" when wearing their everyday "abject" bodies (Yunuen Lewis 187), to be relegated into a category that we may imagine as opposite to Yunuen Lewis's "ethereal denial of the abject, the bodily, and the earthly" (187). However, when "the bodily and the earthly" reappear as carefully orchestrated and constructed qualities in fictional narrative cinema as attributes of the female characters, for example the aforementioned roles of Gheorghiu, Popistașu and Marinca, their power and influence overflows the fictions, invading spectatorial reality too.

Unglamorous female stardom in Romanian New Wave may be therefore described as a nonnarcissistic female public identity formation, which is rooted in the materiality of the female body, instead of being a projected ideal of "ethereal classic white femininity" (Yunuen Lewis 187). In the classical paradigm of Hollywood female stardom, "the glamorous impersonates the ordinary" (Mulvey 18), with "the projected image of perfection contrast[ing] the relatively mundane existence of the spectator-subject" (Salzberg 9). Paradoxically, in the analysed examples of actors as film stars of the Romanian New Wave, what we encounter are cases of the ordinary onscreen ideal star image impersonating the ordinary spectator in the real world. Richard Dyer formulates that "[s]tars are examples of the way people live their relation to production in capitalist society" (5), which resonates deeply with Stephen Gundle's definition of glamour as "an alluring image closely related to consumption" (3–4). The postcommunist Romanian cinematic industry is a specific configuration in this respect, and it is the context of film production that will allow for a deeper examination of unglamorous female stars as formed by the Romanian New Wave.

Producing Unglamorous Stars in Small and Peripheral Milieus

For several reasons, the conditions of contemporary Romanian cinema are not uniformly favourable to any type of filmmaking. Financial, technological, institutional and human resources are often either not there, or haphazardly available, film production being sustained by, and also nourishing, a nonintegrated, often improvised studio background, or indeed theatre and television as production sites or originators. Further impediments are the disorganised, nonintegrated modes of distribution and local/regional audiences restricted by linguistic barriers, and not well understood because of the lack of long-term audience and market research.

As Alexander Dhoest observes, the lack of an integrated film studio background weakens the position of female actors as far as their star image construction is considered (21).[5] As highlighted by Morey (118), in *From Reverence to Rape* Molly Haskell connects the choices of Hollywood female star actors to possibilities available for them in the disintegrating classical studio system of the late 1950s: "[t]he absence of the image-manufacturing apparatus gave the actresses greater freedom, but as non-stars they had less power'" (326). The lack of an integrated Romanian studio-system and its missing apparatus that could construct and maintain star images and screen personas may be easily defined in Haskell's terms "as the absence of the image-

manufacturing apparatus" (326). In this context I need to emphasise the conclusion Haskell and Morey draw: the absence of such a star-fabricating studio apparatus "gave the actresses greater freedom" in wearing whatever they like, and downplaying the markers of stardom if they wish so—yet "as non-stars they had less power" (326).

The actors analysed here incorporate the status of starring actor of the Romanian New Wave with an explicitly unglamorous female public identity and, occasionally, screen persona too. Within the nonintegrated production context of an Eastern European small cinema, this also might be linked to the fact that the actors analysed, with minor exceptions, carry alone the burden of dominant female involvement throughout the production process and, sometimes, also within the diegetic worlds of the films. The small amount of symbolic, but also decision-making and financial power that female actors possess is one reason that the Romanian New Wave is not particularly associated with, or marketed through, its powerful female characters and stories, but rather through the director-auteurs, the screenwriters and even the DOPs. The actors are giving their bodies—as evidenced in any of the aforementioned films' iconic posters and DVD material, or indeed Maria Popistașu's overused body images—for representation, and are not being paid with glamour in return.

Besides the lack of integrated studio background one also needs to consider the necessity for the actor and star to be distinguishable. Christine Gledhill argues that "[a]ctors become stars when their off-screen life-styles and personalities equal or surpass acting ability in importance" (xii). Also because of the previously mentioned industry and production characteristics, these off-screen lifestyles and personalities do not have a chance to flourish in a contemporary Romanian, or an Eastern European cinematic context, "acting ability" basically being the entrance ticket to film industry (King 181). Thus, the equation proposed by Barry King in his analysis of stars' acting abilities and actors' star abilities—"[f]or actors of limited or average ability, investing their energies in the cultivation of a persona represents something within their control and a means of competing with actors who have ability in impersonation" (181)—certainly cannot be applied to these gifted Romanian actresses.

In relation to the star/actor dichotomy and a propos such established stars of Hollywood-type mainstream film culture as Bette Davis or Meryl Streep, Anne Morey states that "the talented actress" must be necessarily separated from "mere stardom" (113). Even if housed by the same physical body, "mere stardom" is characterised by sheer physical beauty: "Davis was both star and great actress, a contradiction that had to be resolved in various ways, particularly since the great actress discourse required that Davis downplay the physical attractions associated with 'mere' stardom" (113). The problem with the application of such an observation to Luminița Gheorghiu, Maria Popistașu or Anamaria Marinca is that none of these actors has ever reached those heights of fame and stardom where the denial of physical beauty needs to emerge as a discursive counterbalance.

These examples originate from an Eastern European cinema that may be considered a small national cinema based on Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie's model, where an entity is identified as such based on the size of the producing country's territory, its number of inhabitants, the GNI per capita and the experience of domination by nonnationals (6). Apart from

under-researched Romanian cinema, the framework of small national cinemas comprises such better-studied examples as Danish, Norwegian or Flemish cinema.

Focusing on Liv Ullmann's career as a film star in 1960s Norwegian cinema, Gunnar Iversen states that "Norwegian minor film 'stars' were created in contrast to Hollywood stars, not as imitations. Glamour was perceived as something not belonging to or inappropriate in Norwegian culture at the time" (79). With reference to 1980s–1990s Flemish film culture and primarily male stars, Alexander Dhoest observes that "Flemish actors' public personas stress ordinariness, so the formative contrast between extraordinariness and ordinariness is equally absent" (22). In *Stellar Encounters: Stardom in Popular European Cinema*, terms such as "charismatic ordinariness" (Iversen) or "vernacular stardom" (Schneider and Hediger) are used to describe European movie stars who do not "offer perfected or retouched representations" of themselves (Gundle 3–4), as an essence of being glamorous in either Stacey's (159) or Gundle's sense (3–4).

In this context, and based on the analysis of diegetic roles and star personas of Luminița Gheorghiu, Maria Popistașu and Anamaria Marinca, the suggestions of Gunnar Iversen referring to Norwegian stars and those of Alexander Dhoest concerning Flemish stars may be confirmed and extended to Romanian New Wave stars too. Small cinematic canons in contemporary Europe seemingly articulate their deep-rooted, obvious differences from mainstream global Hollywood, or indeed major European cinemas, also by generating stars that counter spectacle and glamour. This general argument is supported by Barry King, who states that "stardom is a strategy of performance that is an adaptive response to the limits and pressures exerted upon acting in the mainstream cinema" (169). To this observation I would add that, while glamorous stardom is dependent upon mainstream cinema's limits, unglamorous stardom as a formation has its roots in the limits of small cinematic canons that are also peripheral in most of cases.

In a synchronic analysis, which is the central concept of my article, unglamorous female stardom may be understood in the framework of small national cinemas, but from a historical perspective the formation of public female identity in postcommunist Romania must be considered as another important frame of reference.

A Postcommunist Coda

The female public identity stereotypes dominant in twentieth-century Romanian culture, relevant to my present analysis, cannot be described without considering the changes that intervened in the conditions of the various social classes due to communist-type restructuring processes. In fact, glamour itself is conceived of as fundamentally embedded within the advent of postaristocratic, commercial, bourgeois society in Stephen Gundle's theory, being another major example of how the hierarchy of social classes changed in a relatively short period of time: "Glamour was a result of the release on to the market of the possessions, heritage, prerogatives, styles, and practices of the aristocracy and of the appropriation and manipulation of these by commercial forces and other actors in the urban environment" (5).

It is generally agreed that, among the postcommunist public identity possibilities available to women in Romania, one cannot avoid the endurance and latency of the rural-peasant background of most inhabitants of the country throughout the twentieth century. This stereotype suffered modifications with the instauration of the socialist state; Doina Pasca Harsanyi discusses "a socialist reinterpretation of the peasant tradition of female modesty", when "[l]ittle by little, all signs and images of feminine beauty or desirability disappeared, being proclaimed harmful and indecent" (47). The mould that therefore emerged as supported by official communist discourses, marking a woman's public success, was the image of "nomenklatura women", to be observed throughout the whole Eastern Bloc (48). They were the "official political women who were supposed to be role models … [and] had to comply with the party ideal of the exemplary woman, and had to look the part too. They could not dress fashionably, wear makeup, or look attractive in any way" (48).

Here we can see a trace of diluted feminist agendas that have certainly influenced Romanian conceptions of female public identity during postcommunism. In this respect, 2000s Romanian New Wave unglamorous female actresses as stars may be compared to a similar public female identity formation: that of Indian actor and star Smita Patil, who is explicitly theorised as "unglamorous" in the context of 1970s–1980s New Indian Cinema.[6] She has occupied the position of the "emancipated woman of Indian cinema" (Gandhy and Thomas 129), being:

> Like many of her generation of urban women in India … partially influenced by a western notion of feminism, and her image was somewhat antithetical to the glamorous image of the Indian film-star. Wearing little or no make-up, she was described as "natural looking" and always dressed in traditional saris which paradoxically enhanced her unconventional image. (Gandhy and Thomas 131)

Besides the possibilities circumscribed by "the peasant tradition of female modesty" and its reinterpretation into the socialist-type "disappearance of signs of feminine desirability", Denise Roman draws attention to a third relevant female stereotype: that of bourgeois, middle-class female attractiveness (47). Persecuted and denigrated in the socialist state, it existed nevertheless as a secret possibility of identification, re-emerging in the formation that Roman names postcommunist urban popular culture. However, in Roman's view this time it became a signifier of loose/indecent/immoral and, thus, free female public identity, with a declassing process also visible: "Women live under a new revived *feminine mystique*, wearing flashy makeup and dressing flamboyantly, which the previous communist ascetic moral code considered either licentious or 'bourgeois'", with the stereotype having evident links to "new casino culture, gambling and prostitution" (55, emphasis in original).

Parallel to the declassing of "bourgeois feminine mystique" in postcommunism, Roman also "notes that the identity construction of women operates in a complex of inferiority, corresponding to various levels of social, economic, and political marginalization" (100). This is a historical process that Mihaela Miroiu condenses in the concept of the "minimalist citizen" who is "is unaware of the language of contractualist democracies—rights and liberties—and her

or his only wish is to live invisibly" (qtd. in Roman 100). It is not hard to identify such impulses in the formation of the analysed type of female movie stars.

This brief overview allows me to connect unglamorous female movie stardom in the Romanian New Wave of the twenty-first century to a number of twentieth-century stereotypes that prove to be remarkably persistent. The modesty of a peasant girl, the respectability of a nomenklatura woman and the deep-rooted aversion to immoral, unreliable bourgeois attractiveness might be evoked as specific, local, small-national reasons. These fuel the image of the female Romanian New Wave star, who initially appears as glamorous, only to have all that glamour aggressively withdrawn, as evidenced by the case studies presented.

Conclusion

Unglamorous female stardom in Romanian New Wave cinema shows a major contradiction between screen role and screen persona, characterised by an evident lack of ideal(istic) images—such as those mentioned by Gundle or Stacey—available to the audience. Either the examined actors' roles in the aforementioned films and/or their screen personas as stars of the Romanian New Wave are in contrast to historical patterns of glamorous female identity such as that seen in classical Hollywood cinema, while displaying similarities to small national cinemas in Europe in this respect.

Thus, although it seems paradoxical to associate unglamour to Romanian female movie stardom, the coherence of this formation as a discursive–cultural construct emerges if one takes into account that Romanian New Wave cinema pertains to the European film canon—which has always been in a binary opposition to what Hollywood and mainstream Western cinema are supposed to symbolise. Within that canon, the Romanian New Wave appears as an Eastern European national cinema that may be conceived of as small in the sense of Hjort and Petrie, and therefore a peripheral cinematic formation in world cinema, with evident implications for female movie stardom possibilities. Finally, Romanian New Wave cinema is a postcommunist cultural phenomenon and as such it presents typical and regional patterns into which gendered identities might be articulated. One could argue that these actresses are doubly withheld from the route leading to glamorous female stardom: industry-wise, and as constructed in their postcommunist spectators' realities.

Notes

[1] Mihăileanu's *Train of Life* was an international coproduction with Romanian participation (together with France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Israel), while France, Germany and Romania were coproduction partners in Haneke's *Code Unknown*.

[2] In an email to the author, the PR manager of the campaign, Cătălin Anchidin, stated that "the association with Bette Davis was not an intended one. There were other parallels made with Helen Mirren or other stars in global cinema, but in the promotional campaign we did not appeal to such types of association" (my transl.). However, as mentioned by the manager, the critics were eager to point to such possibilities of association and interpretation.

[3] The rumour turned out to be half-true: Bogdan Dumitrache was indeed wearing clothes designed for the occasion by Adina Buzatu, but the designer was not responsible for the appearance of Luminița Gheorghiu (Anchidin).

[4] Although the Getty Images photographs cannot be reproduced here due to licensing fees, they may be consulted online, see Strummer. The actress appears in the same outfit in the cited Hotnews video.

[5] "On the social level, stardom is closely linked to the industrial organisation of film production, as exemplified by the classical Hollywood star system. In Flanders, this precondition for a star system is not fulfilled, as there exists no film industry to speak of" (Dhoest 21).

[6] New Indian Cinema is another globally positioned new wave originating in a peripheral, nonmainstream cinematic context, also emerging from a postcolonial condition. Thus it may be compared to postsocialist Romanian New Wave cinema, with which it shares such common production and poetic features as "low budget, experimental proposals, no star names, filmed on location" (Gandhy and Thomas 129).

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Andrea Virginás is associate professor in the Media Department of Sapientia University (Cluj-Napoca, Romania). Her research interests include theories of media and culture, contemporary film (genres, iconographies, canons) and feminism. She has published three books (*Az erdélyi prérin. Médiatájkép* [On the Transylvanian Prairie. A Media Panorama] (2008), *Crime Genres and The Modern-Postmodern Turn: Canons, Gender, Media* (2008), *Media* (2008), republished as *Post/Modern Crime: Changing Paradigms? From Agatha Christie to Palahniuk, from Film Noir to* Memento (2011), and *Audiovizuális kommunikáció* [Audiovisual Communication] (2015)) and articles, reviews and pieces of criticism in Hungarian and English. She is an editorial board member of *TNTeF (e-Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies)* published by Szeged University (Hungary).